Original article

Perception of safety of urban residents

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INFORMATIONS	ABSTRACT
	Modern cities generate many threats. Based on the conducted pilot studies and analysis of available statistical data, the authors of the article try to answer the following questions of what determines the sense of safety of urban residents and how residents assess their own safety.

Introduction

Most of the world's population lives in cities today. Modern cities, despite technological progress – ubiquitous camera monitoring and the existence of services such as the Police or the City Guard – are a space where many pathologies of social life exist. The local authorities' level of knowledge and risk management skills have a big impact on responding to emergency situations. In terms of public safety, the following threats can be distinguished:

- activities threating the system of city management and its institutions,
- crimes against life and health,
- robberies, burglary, theft,
- corruption,
- disturbances of quiet hours, threats to life, health and property [Wodz 1988, p. 53].

The issue of ensuring safety of urban residents' life covers all areas of social life. Environmental hazards related to exhaust emissions and coal combustion should also be added.

The scope of social safety covers primarily psychosocial, cultural and social aspects. It creates a guarantee of decent living conditions and full personal development [Ksiezopolski 2001, p. 26].

Safety of urban residents' life, namely factors influencing the level of safety, the safety assessment of Polish cities and the results of pilot studies related to the sense of safety of respondents living in cities, is the subject of analysis in this article.

1. Transformations of modern cities

Sociological studies, the subject of which were cities, were initiated by members of the so-called Chicago school. A city is a large, densely populated, permanent place of residence of individuals with different status. The number, population density and heterogeneity of groups have an impact on the emergence of social structures, where primitive groups are replaced by secondary groups. Interpersonal relationships become anonymous and indirect, which can lead to the isolation of an individual and weakening of social integration [Mikolajewska 1999, p. 125-126].

Cities have become the life environment of an ever-increasing world population as well as the center of diverse forms of human activity [Pawlak and Pawlak 2010, p. 1]. The changes of cities observed nowadays are a result of many long-term processes occurring in the economy and society. These include globalization and the emergence of the so-called global cities – megacities. In megacities, one can clearly observe the phenomenon of social stratification (areas of wealth and poverty), problems related to environmental pollution and crime, congestion as well as communication problems [Weclawowicz 2002, p. 45].

The biggest negative consequences of globalization affect people from the poorest regions. They are pushed to the margins of society, which can lead to disruption of world peace, social disintegration and the collapse of democracy. The system of globalization, in addition to many benefits, leads to exacerbation of conflicts in the international and global arena [Jalowiecki 2002, p. 6]. The transformations of city structures have deep consequences for:

- communication systems,
- public space systems,
- recreational complexes,
- park and forest areas.

In the context of changes of modern cities, the concept of metropolization takes on a new meaning. A large city constitutes the economic and cultural center of a bigger area. They are created using new techniques and innovations, supported by human capital. B. Jalowiecki describes metropolises as not only large cities, but also independent entities of political importance. This means that more and more often they act as independent bodies respective to states in which they are located. Their activities include the flow of goods and services on a global scale. It is expected that the economy of the whole state will depend on the activities of metropolises in the future [Jalowiecki 2002, p. 7].

An agglomeration has been an equally important phenomenon accompanying the development of cities. An agglomeration is an area of intensive building, characterized by

a particularly high density of the population residing in a given area periodically (e.g., during the day) or permanently. Large movements of people and goods as well as exchange of services characterize agglomerations. There are two types of agglomerations:

– monocentric – with one main city,

– polycentric – with a few important urban centers.

In 2008 there were 477 agglomerations in the world with at least one million inhabitants and 46 agglomerations with a population over 5 million. The development of agglomerations located close to one another can lead to the emergence of an immense and highly urbanized area defined as megalopolis. Until the mid-twentieth century the largest population growth characterized large cities, including industrial centers. However, after 1950 they were cities with a complex economic structure and capitals, and especially urban centers of high international importance. The concept of a "megacity" was introduced by the UN in the 1970s and meant urban agglomerations of 8 million inhabitants. In the 1990s, the criterion of 10 million was adopted [Pawlak and Pawlak 2010, p. 1]. Megalopolis is a center created by merging two neighboring agglomerations. It is characterized by an extensive urbanized zone [Pawlak and Pawlak 2010, p. 4]. There are about thirty megalopolises currently in the world. The so-called BRSTO, comprising Tokyo-Yokohama, Osaka-Kobe, Seoul, Beijing and Tianjin together with highly urbanized neighboring areas, is the biggest international urban corridor in the world [Pawlak and Pawlak 2010, p. 5].

2. Threats in cities

Cities offer extensive opportunities and conditions for a comfortable and prosperous life. At the same time, they are centers of social conflicts due to inequalities between people whose interests and possibilities for achieving needs are different [Giddens 2004, p. 595-596]. The most serious problems of developed cities include:

– growth of crime,

– drug abuse,

– prostitution,

– civilization diseases,

– homelessness,

– large immigration of foreigners and problems with their acclimatization,

– communication problems,

– difficulties in finding a job in accordance with qualifications,

– environmental degradation (smog, sewage, garbage).

On the other hand, the fundamental problems of developing cities include:

– demographic explosion,

– emergence of poverty districts around city centers,

– lack of proper living standards,

– epidemics of infectious diseases,

– high proportion of unqualified population,

– problems in finding a job,

– development of crime,

– growth of prostitution and drug market,

– lack of financial resources for treatment [Filis 2007, p. 45].

The problems of urban life have a great impact on the quality and safety of life. The growth of some of the threats leads to social unrest and reduces the sense of safety in the place of residence.

3. Safety of cities in Poland

There are many factors influencing the safety of a city. Indicators allowing to assess the sense of safety of residents are related to the safety of life, health and property. In order to analyze the level of safety of cities in Poland, the Central Statistical Office created a ranking of cities in terms of the number and types of crimes committed against values highly appreciated by people.

The number of crimes per 1,000 residents is, in a sense, an indicator of the level of safety in a given city, but it must be borne in mind that all crimes (listed in Table 1) have been treated equally, regardless of their type and social harmfulness. It should be noted that minor offenses do not affect the residents' sense of safety as seriously as criminal offenses. Table 1 provides information on offenses of criminal, economic and road nature, per 1,000 inhabitants. When analyzing this information, the level of crime detectability should also be considered. A higher level of detectability is not always equivalent to a higher level of safety perceived by residents. The statistics of the General Police Headquarters concerning the year 2015 show that the number of crimes is nominally the highest in Warsaw. In 2015, it amounted to almost 52 thousand. In statistics Warsaw will not be on the top places because it is the largest city in Poland with the highest population [*Miasta w Polsce…* n.d.].

The comparison of data on regional capitals suggests that people can feel safest in Bialystok, and the least safe – in Katowice. In Bialystok the crime rate per 1,000 residents in 2015 did not exceed 18.8. The key criterion was the number of crimes in Police statistics defined as the *complete list of crimes* in 2015 per 1,000 inhabitants. The number of recorded offenses fell by around 20 percent in a year in Bialystok. Compared to other cities, Bialystok positively stands out due to, among others, a small number of car thefts, property damage, theft of another person's property and criminal offenses [Komenda Glowna Policji… n.d.].

The list below presents regional capitals, counting from the safest to the least safe city in Poland, in terms of the number of crimes per 1,000 residents.

City safety can be assessed in terms of statistics, but they provide only a certain picture of the situation and do not always reflect the subjective sense of residents' safety. At present, there are no detailed statistics regarding the city safety, referring to the safety assessment of each area, not only in terms of the number of crimes, but also in eco-

nomic, environmental, health and other aspects. The reason for the lack of such research is the broad concept of safety and the resulting difficulties in comparing available data.

Table 1. The level of safety in Polish cities

No.	Regional capital	Number of crimes	Crime per 1,000 inhabitants
1.	Bialystok	5,532	18.8
2.	Bydgoszcz	8,098	22.4
3.	Rzeszow	4,238	23.3
4.	Gdansk	12,752	27.7
5.	Lublin	9,805	28.2
6.	Olsztyn	4,993	28.8
7.	Gorzow Wlkp.	3,767	30.2
8.	Warszawa	51,950	30.3
9.	Lodz	22,072	30.7
10.	Kielce	6,322	31.5
11.	Szczecin	14,321	35.0
12	Krakow	26,960	36.9
13.	Opole	4,715	38.8
14.	Wroclaw	28,490	45.1
15.	Poznan	24,937	45.3
16.	Katowice	17,816	58.9

Source: [own elaboration based on the data from the GUS (Central Statistical Office) in 2015,
Cities in Poland with the highest number of offenses recorded per 1,000 inhabitants, Poland in numbers;
see Miasta w Polsce… n.d.].

4. Own research results

Own research, conducted in the form of an online survey, aimed at assessing perceptions of own safety by urban residents.

The survey research was conducted using a questionnaire placed on the web portal https://www.survio.com/survey/d/X7B5V2X4B4K0X1V4G. The link was put on online forums regarding the sense of safety, asking to fill in the questionnaire addressed to people who live in medium and large cities in Poland. 40 people filled out the questionnaire via the Internet.

4.1. The aim of the study and research problems

The aim of the presented research was to determine the sense of safety of people in cities in Poland. The research problem in this study comes down to the question: what is the sense of safety of respondents living in medium and large cities?

The analysis of own research and data from the literature and other documents carried out in this work aims to answer the following detailed questions:

1. Do respondents fear that they can become a victim of crime in their place of residence?
2. What kind of threats occur in the respondents' place of residence?
3. What is the opinion of the respondents about the effectiveness of the Police and the City Guard?
4. Has the level of safety increased in recent years in the place of residence of a research participant?
5. What are the respondents' opinions about the expected level of safety in the coming years?
6. How do the respondents assess the level of safety on the streets from the perspective of a pedestrian and a driver?

The hypothesis formulated for this study is:

"The respondents do not feel safe in their place of residence."

4.2. The socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents

The people who participated in the research were mainly between the age of 21 and 25, of whom there were 26 persons (65%). Eleven respondents (27.5%) were 26 to 35 years old. One respondent (2.5%) was under 21, one person was under 36 and one respondent was older than 55. Most of the respondents were people with higher education – 26 (65%). 11 respondents finished their secondary education (27.5%) and 3 people (7.5%) had vocational education. In the research sample, there were no people with lower and lower secondary education.

The most numerous group of respondents (37.5%) lived in cities with more than 200,000 inhabitants. 14 respondents (35%) came from cities with 50,000 to 100,000 residents. 6 respondents (15%) lived in a city with less than 100,000 inhabitants. The smallest number of respondents, 5 (12.5%) came from a small town under 50,000 residents.

4.3. The sense of safety in the place of residence

Table 2 compares the frequencies of respondents' answers to the questionnaire questions regarding their sense of safety (the asterisk marks the questions to which the respondents answered that they felt safe).

In the research sample, most respondents (65%) expressed a general belief that they felt safe in their place of residence. 40% of respondents did not share this belief, while 5% of respondents did not express their opinion on this issue. Nevertheless, almost half of research participants (45%) indicated that they could become a victim of crime in their place of residence. The same number of people did not express concerns about their safety and 5% of respondents did not have a clear opinion on the matter. The people surveyed in the clear majority (65%) admitted that there were thefts, fights and

beatings in their areas. Nearly one fifth of respondents did not agree with this statement and 12.5% of the research sample did not have an explicit opinion on this issue. More than half of the respondents agreed with the statement that apartment burglaries occur in their place of residence. 40% of research participants disagreed, while 7.5% did not have a clear opinion on the matter. Most of the respondents (70%) stated that they observed incidents with the participation of people who were intoxicated or under the influence of drugs in their areas. 20% of respondents did not report these incidents and 10% did not refer unambiguously to this issue. In the research sample, nearly 4/5 (77.5%) said that they observed acts of vandalism in their areas. One fifth of respondents did not share these observations and 2.5% of respondents did not specify their answer to this subject. Most of the research participants did not complain about the disturbance of the quite hours by neighbors (67.5%). 27.5% of respondents had a different opinion on this matter.

Table 2. The sense of safety in the place of residence (% of answers)

Question of the questionnaire	Strongly disagree	Rather disagree	Rather agree	Strongly disagree	Hard to say
I feel same in the place of residence*	12.5	17.5	32.5	32.5	5
I fear that I can become a victim of crime in my place of residence*	17.5	27.5	30	15	5
Thefts occur in my place of residence	7.5	15	37.5	27.5	12.5
Fights and beatings occur in my place of residence	7.5	12.5	40	30	10
Apartment burglaries occur in my place of residence	12.5	27.5	37.5	15	7.5
Incidents with the participation of people who are intoxicated and under the influence of drugs occur in my place of residence	10	10	42.5	27.5	10
Acts of vandalism (destruction of property) occur in my place of residence	7.5	12.5	35	42.5	2.5
My neighbors disturb the quiet hours*	35	37.5	22.5	5	0

* answers in which respondents indicated that they feel safe

Source: [own study, N=40].

4.5. Assessment of the effectiveness of the Police and the City Guard

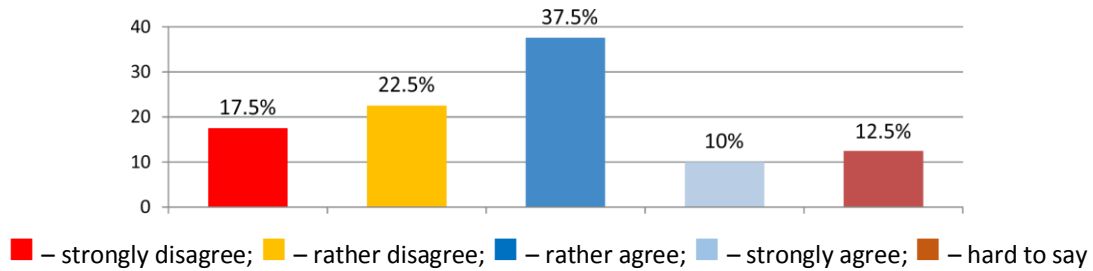The respondents were asked to assess the work of the Police and the City Guard.

■ – strongly disagree; ■ – rather disagree; ■ – rather agree; ■ – strongly agree; ■ – hard to say

Fig. 1. The Police works effectively in my city
Source: [own study, N=40].

Nearly half of the respondents (47.5%) expressed a positive opinion about the work of the Police. Nevertheless, 40% of respondents indicate objections to the work of this institution. In the sample, 12.5% of respondents did not have a clear opinion on the work of the Police.
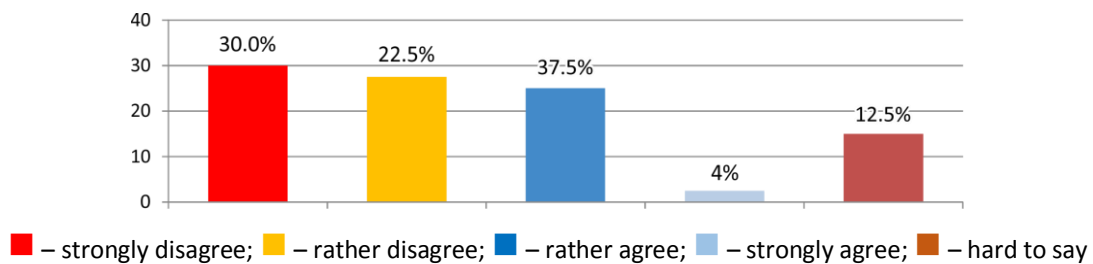

■ – strongly disagree; ■ – rather disagree; ■ – rather agree; ■ – strongly agree; ■ – hard to say

Fig. 2. The City Guard works effectively in my city
Source: [own study, N=40].

2/5 (40%) of respondents had objections to the work of the City Guard. Slightly more, 51.5%, expressed their satisfaction with the work of this formation. More than one in ten respondents did not have a specified opinion on this issue.

4.6. Assessment of the level of safety people in the past and in the future

Next questions of the survey focused on the level of safety of respondents in their place of residence in the past and future perspective.
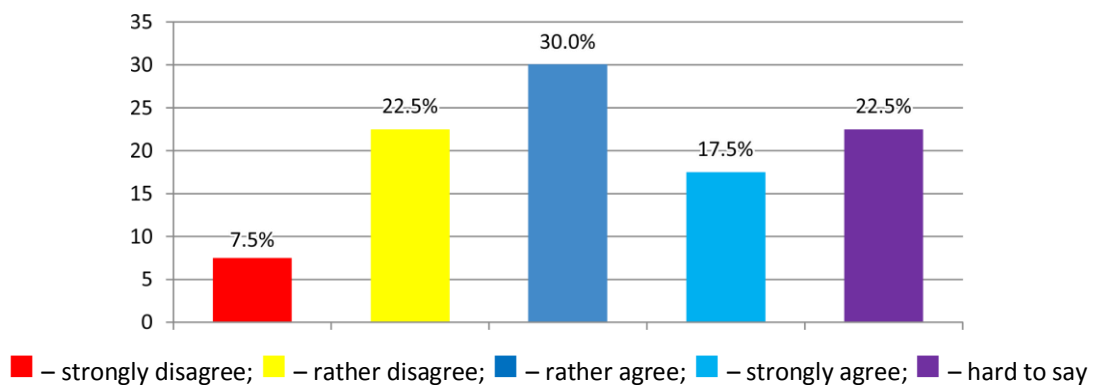

■ – strongly disagree; ■ – rather disagree; ■ – rather agree; ■ – strongly agree; ■ – hard to say

Fig. 3. The level of security has increased in my place of residence in recent years
Source: [own study, N=40].

Almost one third (29.5%) of the people in the research sample observe positive changes in terms of safety that have occurred in recent years. They are slightly outnumbered by respondents (30%) who did not agree with this statement. More than one fifth of respondents (22.5%) did not give a clear assessment of this issue.
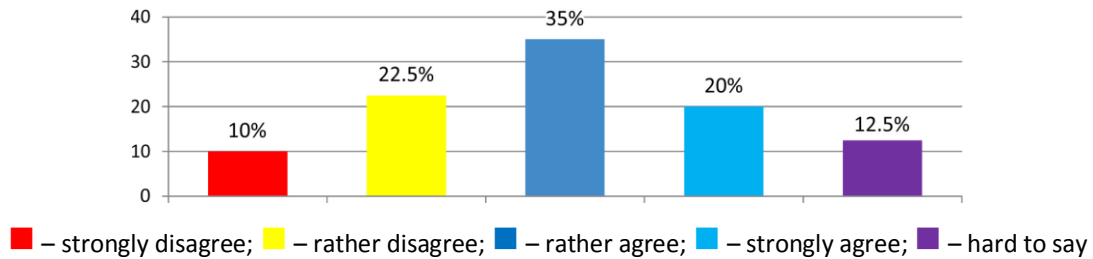

– strongly disagree; – rather disagree; – rather agree; – strongly agree; – hard to say

Fig. 4. I expect an increase in the level of safety of people's lives in my city
Source: [own study, N=40].

More than one third of the surveyed (32.5%) responded to the assessment of safety in the future pessimistically. More than half of research participants (55%) expressed optimism on this issue. 12.5% of respondents indicated no clear assessment of the problem.

4.7. The sense of people's safety in the role of a pedestrian and a driver

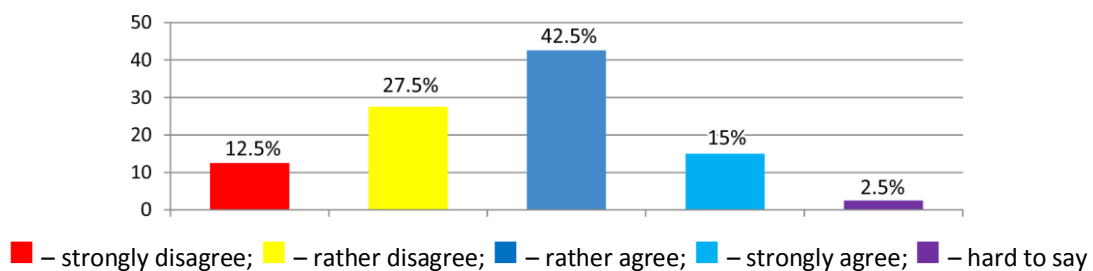The respondents were asked their sense of safety in road traffic, in the role of a pedestrian and a driver.

– strongly disagree; – rather disagree; – rather agree; – strongly agree; – hard to say

Fig. 5. I feel safe on the street as a pedestrian
Source: [own study, N=40].

More than half of respondents (57.5%) indicated that they felt safe on the street in the role of a pedestrian. 40% of research participants did not share this belief and 2.5% of respondents did not react unambiguously to this problem.
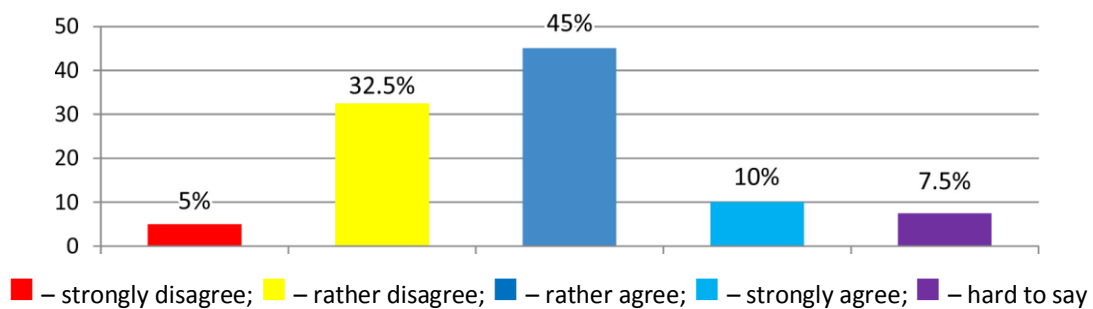

– strongly disagree; – rather disagree; – rather agree; – strongly agree; – hard to say

Fig. 6. I feel safe on the street as a driver
Source: [own study, N=40].

Almost 2/5 of respondents (37.5%) indicated that they did not feel safe in the role of a driver. However, more than half of research participants (55%) expressed a different opinion on this matter. 7.5% of people surveyed did not give a clear assessment of the problem.
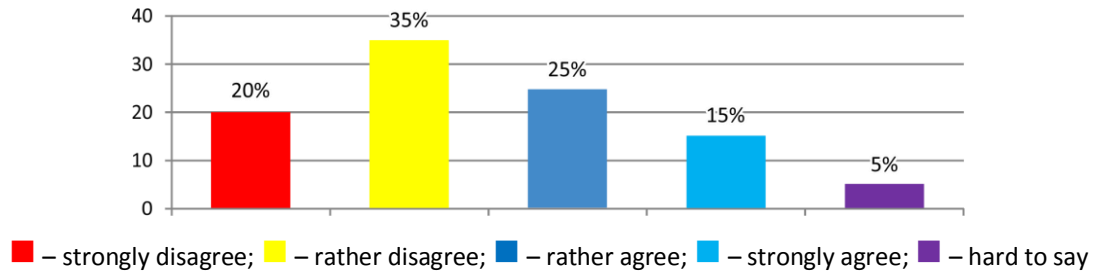

■ – strongly disagree; ■ – rather disagree; ■ – rather agree; ■ – strongly agree; ■ – hard to say

Fig. 7. There are many traffic accidents in the area where I live
Source: [own study, N=40].

Most of the respondents (55%) denied that they had observed many traffic accidents in their areas. Every fourth research participant (40%) was of a different opinion. 5% of respondents indicated difficulties with answering the question.

Conclusion

Cities are continually developing, becoming centers of increasingly numerous communities with different status. Migration of people from rural to urban areas is a result of the expectation of development opportunities. Possibilities for achieving life goals are not equal for everyone. Disproportionate access to highly valued goods causes the growth of pathologies. A sense of security is one of the most important human needs. Ensuring the safety of citizens is the primary task of city authorities and services guarding the security and public order.

For the purpose of this analysis, it was assumed that the respondents do not feel safe in their place of residence. The results of own research indicate that the respondents express a generalized opinion that they feel safe in their place of residence, although in terms of specific threats, the respondents' answers varied. Thus, the respondents have observed the problem of property destruction, incidents involving people who are intoxicated and under the influence of drugs, as well as thefts and apartment burglary.

More than half of the respondents are satisfied with the effectiveness of the operation of the Police. The results of the research on the activities of the City Guard are more pessimistic. More than half of the respondents expressed their negative opinion about this formation. The fact that nearly half of the respondents noted that the level of safety has improved in recent years is optimistic. Most opinions expressed hope for an improvement of the situation in terms of the safety of life in a city. Most respondents positively assess their safety in the context of participation in the road traffic. Therefore, the respondents feel safe in the role of a pedestrian and a driver and they do not observe many traffic accidents in their area.

Considering the results of own research, it can be stated that the hypothesis has not been confirmed. Opinions expressing the sense of safety predominate – out of 15 questions that are indicators of the dependent variable (which is the sense of respondents' safety), in 9 cases the respondents demonstrated the sense of safety, while in 6 cases they indicated the sense of danger.

Finally, it should be added that the survey research conducted has its limitations. The research sample is not representative because it was selected in a non-random way. Thus, the results cannot be generalized to the whole population. It can be concluded that the obtained results have yet to be confirmed in following, broader studies on a representative sample.

Conflict of interests

The author declared no conflict of interests.

Author contributions

All authors contributed to the interpretation of results and writing of the paper. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

Ethical statement

The research complies with all national and international ethical requirements.

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